

THE NEW YEAR'S PLAYS



Madge Kennedy

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE enterprise at the mid-Princess Theatre ought to have an effect on the theatrical entertainment of the day if all its achievements keep up to the average of "Very Good Eddie." That entertaining little play has many qualities which are not to be found elsewhere. Any unique quality is of the same inestimable value to a theatrical production that it is to a can opener. It is a case of must. So with its comparative modesty of means in view of the apparatus of other New York productions of the same character "Very Good Eddie" possesses charms all its own.

Refinement and musical force have come to be almost contradictory terms in this city. Nobody ever sought the two simultaneously. There is, however, a degree of refinement that is possible to such entertainments and may even be the source of pleasure to that large section of the theatre-going world which cannot live by Jack Wilson or Fannie Brice alone and refuses to be comforted by the artistic ministrations of Ray Samuels or Blossom Seeley. It is not, of course, asking too much merely to suggest that the managers try to do a little better for us than produce these stage celebrities for our continuous delectation. They are of the kind that made so complete the separation between refinement and musical force.

The performance of "Very Good Eddie" shows that a dozen pretty girls, carefully dressed and following in their facial adornment something less flamboyant in its color scheme than a barber's pole, may be quite as diverting to contemplate as three or four times the number painted in the steady tint of an Alaskan totom pole. Then a few capable actors and some with enough voices to sink their lyrics legibly may, if they have the proper material, prove just as entertaining as a hundred more or less.

Many of these conditions exist in the production of "Very Good Eddie." Mr. Bartholomae's intrigue is interesting. Mr. Bolton's text is witty and there is some admirable music from Jerome Kern. About the proceedings there is an air of politeness which makes the play different from all similar productions now on view.

So the little Princess Theatre may bring about a new manner of doing an old thing, which is about the most that any new movement in musical plays may consist of. Jules Offenbach began his efforts in the realm of French opera bouffe, and this German from Cologne may be truthfully said to have reformed it, while Gilbert and Sullivan made their beginnings most modestly in London. Even the Savoy Theatre, which was the special scene of their triumph, is a little box. Little theatres are indeed the cradles of many movements of artistic importance.

Ralph Herz's acting as the more or less dumfounded valet in "Ruggles of Red Gap" would in the past have made the fortune of any drama which happened to be supplied with any single actor so amusing. Of course the comedian dominates the play, for Mr. Herz appears in every scene. One need only wait half a dozen notable successes of the allegedly palmy days to realize that the part cannot any longer be made greater than the whole. Any small and savorily bit of dramatic

writing lived for generations if there were some artist to keep its heart beating by means of a fine or human or popular performance. To realize the difference in the demands of the public one need only recall the play in which Joseph Jefferson gained his greatest popularity and to form some acquaintance with the dreary "theatre" in which Lotta Crabtree used to win applause, and thousands, as well as the mediums by which such players as Barney Macauley, William Florence and half a dozen celebrities used to exist prosperously for years before the public.

But there is no actor that can serve as pulmotor in the case of an inadequate play. It may be that interest in the novel may unite with Mr. Herz's amusing impersonation to attract a measure of popularity to the piece. Mr. Herz's performance is in the highest sense an impersonation. He is a valet and comes of a family of valets. Never once during the complications of the play does he forget that, nor does he fail to make it plain to the audience. And slightly and delicately does he indicate this sense of social inferiority, although he is not ashamed of his calling, that the piece is a continual source of entertainment to all admirers of good acting.

The elimination of the musical features of the piece is another advantage which the first night audience did not witness. The piece is much more reasonable and plausible without the striding ladies of the second act.

Arthur Hopkins may always be counted on to attempt something artistic in every new play which comes before the public under his aegis. The direction which this enterprise takes in "The Devil's Garden" is interesting. Robert Jones, the young American disciple of Max Reinhardt, has designed the scenic investiture for the new play, which contains so much that is fine one can only regret the inexact use of material which was in all probability little adapted to the theatre. The opening scene of the new play is a room in the General Post office in London, which is a properly drab and inexpressive box with a flat background that suggests only the dull routine of official existence. "A room in a third class hotel" follows, and here there is a more noticeable effort to supply a realism which is also to have a part of the significance of the scene. Not only the flashy red wall paper and the furniture obviously gathered from many sources impress the spectator with its truthfulness to life, but there is about the room the impression that it may in reality have been lived in and lived in just in the way that the characters in "The Devil's Garden" used it.

So far as the interior of the farmhouse goes Mr. Jones appears to have exaggerated the good taste and the more or less aesthetic sensibilities of the Dale family. There has been a mighty step forward since the audience saw the same family in the little sitting room over the post office which was in its way altogether true to life. The large area of unadorned wall space at the back of the stage is excusable enough in this act, since it is intended as the ground on which the

stained glass window may later be revealed. While the hero discusses the guilt with the figure of the seducer in whose honor the memorial was erected the window is seen on the wall. The illusion was admirably arranged, perhaps the manner of its gradual appearance and its slow fading away being the most impressive details of the episode. Mr. Jones's work in this play is of course altogether different from the specimens of his skill shown in the highly decorative and fantastic translation from Anatole France which Granville Barker introduced at Wallack's Theatre last spring. And the reality of the pictures in the new play at the Harris Theatre are worth much more than all the extravagant beauty of the medieval play.

Optimistic lovers of American music who have been persistently prophesying the decline of ragtime, as the music is called, would be discouraged at the new lease of life which syncopation has this year taken on the musical shows. Of course Irving Berlin is the spirit of ragtime and with him "Stop! Look! Listen!" would necessarily be only syncopation. That is true. There is one long roll of ragtime from the beginning of this amusing musical play to the end. Mr. Dillingham has in fact devised a continuous reel vaudeville show of the highest quality to the accompaniment of Mr. Berlin's tuneful syncopation. Then this style of music is just as predominant in all the other musical plays, "Very Good Eddie" is of course full of it.

After all, the most original note in "Stop! Look! Listen!" comes from the genius of Robert McQuinn as a designer of the scenery and costumes. One may not be able to grow enthusiastic over Mr. McQuinn's frequent mustard colored frocks, but the scenery is most entertaining. In all Mr. McQuinn's decorations, from the backgrounds to the figures of the young ladies of the chorus, there is a mannered simplicity. But it is sufficiently odd to be, shall one say, chic.

Were Mr. McQuinn a painter he would of course be accused of possessing no sense of color. His pallid and muddy hues would promptly gain for him the censure of the art critics.

THE SEASON'S EARLIEST THEATRICAL OFFERINGS

Among the holiday attractions this week will be "The Blue Pierrots," a well known English company of dancers and singers, who will give two performances daily at the Liberty Theatre.

"Bunny," by Austin Strong, will be acted at the Hudson Theatre on Tuesday by Lewis Stone, Hilda Spong, Henry Stephenson, Gypsy O'Brien, Eva La Gallienne, Claude Herbohn, Olive Murray and others. Concerning the play it is announced:

"Bunny, an Oxford graduate of excellent family and literary tastes, buries himself among the musty tomes of his father's library. He is so absorbed that he forgets, if possible, his infatuation for Sylvia de Crespigny, the dainty, high born girl of his dreams. She is the heroine of his book—the book he has written in the silence of his study. Then Sylvia awakes to find that Sylvia is to be married to an old roue and the marriage is to take place in the very town where he has sought refuge from the world. Bunny the gentle learner of the sacrifice the little Sylvia is making for the social ambitions of her titled family, and Bunny the gentle becomes Bunny the terrible, and through the scenes of de-

licious humor the scholar and reclusive emerges into the warrior bold, and almost—rescue the gentle maiden from the clutches of her worthless suitor.

Then defeat comes to Bunny and all the world seems to tumble about his poor head, until Cupid rushes to the aid of this gentle scholar—a four-wheeler—and Bunny and Sylvia are whisked away to the land where they "live happily ever after."

E. H. Sothern will present T. W. Robertson's comedy, "David Garrick," the third of his offerings during his repertoire season at the Booth Theatre, on Thursday night. The theatre will be closed during the first three days of the week to permit of dress rehearsals. This will be Mr. Sothern's first appearance in the role of David Garrick, made famous by his father. This will not, however, be Mr. Sothern's first appearance in this play. When a boy he appeared in it with his father, and later when his brother Lytton starred in the play, Mr. Sothern, then growing into manhood, impersonated one of the unimportant roles.

The play "David Garrick," from the pen of T. W. Robertson, was adapted from De Moleville's French play called "Sullivan." When the late E. A. Sothern desired a new medium to follow "Lord Dundreary" in Lon-

don it was recalled to his mind that when a young man in a stock company he had appeared in a play founded on Garrick's life by Robertson. This old play was dragged from its hiding place and rewritten by E. A. Sothern. Mr. Sothern did for "David Garrick" what he had already done for "Dundreary." E. A. Sothern appeared in "David Garrick" for the first time in London at the Haymarket Theatre on April 30, 1884. The comedy proved a great success. Nine years later Mr. Sothern acted in the play at Wallack's Theatre, New York, when John Gilbert was seen as Simon Ingot and E. M. Holland as Mr. Jones. In E. H. Sothern's revival of the play Alexandra Carlisle will be seen as Ada Ingot, Fannie Addison Pitt as Mrs. Smith, Catherine Brooks as Miss Araminta Brown, Charles Verner as Simon Ingot, Orlando Huby as Squire Xest and Albert Hovson as Mr. Jones.

Mr. McQuinn carries through the scenery the idea of the sublimated poster with all its portable and unexpected eccentricities of background and color. The beach at Hawaii and the farmhouse are in the present play at the Globe Theatre the most striking examples of the newer theatre art put at the service of musical extravaganzas.

From the Actor's Viewpoint, Says Edwin Arden.

"The motion pictures have done more to 'hearten up' the acting profession than the speaking stage has done to dishearten them—which is considerable," says Edwin Arden, the actor, who along with a number of actors has deserted the speaking for the silent stage. Mr. Arden has been in the pictures for a little over twenty weeks. He appeared in New York in the version of "The Beloved Vagabond," adapted from the story of William J. Locke. One of his first pictures was his own play, "The Eagle's Nest." He has recently been working in a film play of "The Gray Mask," a story of Charles Wadsworth Camp's.

Concerning what the motion pictures have done for the acting profession Mr. Arden says further: "The motion pictures have enabled more actors to hold up their heads, and not be so poverty stricken that they are ashamed to look people in the face, than the stage has done for many years. The pictures pay and pay well. It is not because the producers of pictures are merely generous. It is because they recognize the fact that the actors' services are worth good pay to them.

low—that is a permanent home. No matter how great a star on the legitimate stage is, he cannot get away from travelling. In fact the bigger he is the more sure it is that he will have to travel, for it is in the little towns and the cities throughout the

country where the managers make their real profit on a big name. He may have his beautiful home during the summer, but he is sure to have to travel a share of his time.

"The picture actor may have a little bungalow, no matter how modest, or only a room near the studio. It is a permanent home. He can live a normal, healthy life of regular hours. The stage will have to look to its laurels, or it will die. The youth of the country is attaching itself to the pictures, where it feels there is greater opportunity, and without fresh blood the stage cannot live. It must offer a future, as it does not do, and it must allow young players leeway for original and individual acting, which now it discourages."

With the passing of D. W. Griffith's spectacular production "The Birth of a Nation" from Broadway to the Liberty Theatre, the history of the New York stage is ended by any moving picture in the history of the New York stage.

This new form of entertainment was introduced to New York at a special performance on March 2, 1915, at the Liberty Theatre. The public performance followed the next evening. The new offering found immediate favor. The run at the Liberty Theatre continued forty-five weeks without a break. The total number of consecutive performances there was 629. During the summer months there was a supplementary engagement at Brighton Beach, which is part of the metropolitan theatrical district. This engagement was for fourteen weeks, making a total of 643 consecutive performances in New York. In addition to this there have been eighty-four performances of the spectacle in theatres in Brooklyn and The Bronx. These, however, are not counted in the consecutive run.

In round numbers 616,000 people saw the production at the Liberty Theatre.

Ruth St. Denis to Dance.

Ruth St. Denis's beautiful dances have been so successful at the Hudson Theatre that she will this week move to the Candler Theatre, where on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons she will perform the same programme which she introduced here last week. Miss St. Denis has never devised more beautiful dances than those she brought here from the West.

Vaudeville and Burlesque.

PALACE THEATRE—Elsie Janis returns to vaudeville in impersonations of famous actors and actresses. Others on the programme will include Gars Zora in Indian dances, Gertrude Vanderbilt and George Moore, Ralph Riggs and Katherine Witchie, Flanagan and Edwards, Grace Dunbar Nile, Alf Lydell and company and the Three Steindell Brothers.

COLONIAL THEATRE—Bonnie Glass in exhibition and ballroom dances will be the feature here this week. On the supporting bill will be William Eis and French, Kathleen Clifford, Harry Gilfoil, Hoey and Lee, Santley and Norton, Werner Amoros Troupe and Adelaide Herman.

ALHAMBRA THEATRE—Emma Carus, Lew Dockstader, Harry Green in "The Cherry Tree," Anna Laughlin and William Gaxton, Dorothy Toye, Ethel Clifton and Brenda Fowler, Willard, "The man who grows," the Wood Brothers, the Simar Arabs and others.

COLUMBIA THEATRE—The sixth anniversary of the opening of the Columbia will be celebrated this week. Lew Kelly and the Behman Show will present a new burlesque. The company includes Ameta Pynes, Lon Hascall, James Tenbrooke, Harry Van, Eileen Sheridan, Corinne Ford and others.

YORKVILLE THEATRE—Two new burlesques called "Hello Frisco" and "The Underworld" will be presented here this week by Jack Reid's Record Breakers Company. A strong cast and a large chorus of girls go to make up a lively entertainment.

A PLAY A WEEK.

The Theatre Francaise will present this week Maurice Donnay's well known play, "Georgette Le Meunier." M. Donnay especially requested of Lucien Bonheur that he present this play here during the present season. Last winter the French theatre presented with Gabriel Dorey in the leading role "Les Eclaircies," by the same author. Among the actresses who will take part in the new play are Andree Mery, Renee Davenne, Claude Davenne and Raymond Faure. This will be followed by "Son Homme," with Edgar Becman and Irene Bordoni in the two roles. Three short plays, "Jean Marie," "Le Baiser" and "Un Crane sous une Temple," will be acted at the Friday literary matinee.

Frances Starr, who has been captivating the cities outside New York by her exquisite performance of the novitiate in "Marie Odile," will be at the Standard Theatre this week. This will be one of the last opportunities to witness Edward Knoblauch's charming play of convent life, as Mr. Belasco has a new play in waiting for Miss Starr so soon as she has satisfied the public curiosity to see her in "Marie Odile."

are touring Canada at present. As soon as the conditions warrant in Europe additional companies will be sent on tour in Russia, France, Germany, Spain and Italy.

ABE'S BUSINESS CAREER.

He Really Did Begin as a Clothing Salesman.

"I wasn't always an actor," finally admitted Barney Bernard, who as *Abe Potash* in "Abe and Mawruss" is at the Lyric Theatre. "I know that actors are born and that sometimes though not often, they die, but judging from my experience, I believe am tailor made. I sold suits off stage long before I did on."

"I had my first experience as a clothing salesman in Chillicothe, Ohio, where I worked in my uncle's store about twenty years ago. Now, I ain't a word against Chillicothe, Ohio, which for all I know it could be the greatest town in the world, but Chillicothe, Ohio, is something else again. So I decided to go to Cincinnati."

"I landed in Cincinnati without any money. Finally I got a job in a small clothing store conducted by two brothers. The only reference I had was my two hands and an appetite. My first customer was a typical yoked. He wanted to buy an undershirt, and because the store was in summer season, expected to get one for nothing. I looked at it away till winter. I knew my job depended on selling him the garment, so I worked like a Trojan. At the end of an hour I had two pounds and my customer. We were on the second floor, and as we walked toward the freight elevator, and also for customers—I shoved him in ahead—and sent him down to the basement with a crash. When I heard his yell, I rushed down, explained how the accident happened, took him up again and having by this time my second wind, sold him the undershirt."

"One day in Martinsville, Ind., a couple of woodchoppers about the size of small armored cruisers came into the store and one of them asked for a pocketkerf. I showed him one he liked until I told him I wanted \$8 for it, whereupon he offered me \$4. I might have sold him the pocketkerf and made a reasonable profit, but I was anxious to get even with him. I therefore agreed to let him have the pocketkerf for \$4, and when I wrapped up the bundle substituted a child's overcoat, that cost about \$8, for the pocketkerf."

"Later that day I got out more than I could carry. I was sitting in a five seats ahead of me was my customer, explaining to another man how he had done me. His companion asked to see the bargain. I didn't want. As soon as he began to unwrap the bundle I crawled under the seat and stayed there till I reached my destination. Then I rushed out, jumped onto the hotel bus, gave the driver a dollar and told him to drive on to the hotel, where I was reinforced by half a dozen other salesmen."

"The next day I was standing in front of our store, when the same lumberman came along. He looked at me closely and then asked if he hadn't seen me in Martinsville."

"Never been in the place," I told him.

THE RECORD FILM PLAY RUN

With the passing of D. W. Griffith's spectacular production "The Birth of a Nation" from Broadway to the Liberty Theatre, the history of the New York stage is ended by any moving picture in the history of the New York stage. This new form of entertainment was introduced to New York at a special performance on March 2, 1915, at the Liberty Theatre. The public performance followed the next evening. The new offering found immediate favor. The run at the Liberty Theatre continued forty-five weeks without a break. The total number of consecutive performances there was 629. During the summer months there was a supplementary engagement at Brighton Beach, which is part of the metropolitan theatrical district. This engagement was for fourteen weeks, making a total of 643 consecutive performances in New York. In addition to this there have been eighty-four performances of the spectacle in theatres in Brooklyn and The Bronx. These, however, are not counted in the consecutive run.

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THE PLAYS THAT LAST.

The plays that continue in New York are "Our Mrs. McChesney" at the Lyceum Theatre, "Hobson's Choice" at the Comedy Theatre, "Peter Pan" at the Empire Theatre, "The Boom-Boom" at the Belasco Theatre, "Common Clay" at the Republic Theatre, "The Ware Case" at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, "Sadie Love" at the Gaiety Theatre, "The Eternal Magdalene" at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, "Bunny" at the Madison Theatre, "Major Barbara" at the Playhouse, "Treasure Island" at the Punch and Judy Theatre, "The Weavers" at the Garden Theatre, "The Great Lover" at the Longacre Theatre, "The Devil's Garden" at the Harris Theatre, "Fair and Warmer" at the Eltinge Theatre, "Abe and Mawruss" at the Lyric Theatre, "Hit-the-trail Holiday" at the Astor Theatre, "The Unchastened Woman" at the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre.

The musical plays are "Very Good Eddie" at the Princess Theatre, "Alone at Last" at the Shubert Theatre, "The Blue Paradise" at the Casino Theatre, "Stop! Look! Listen!" at the Globe Theatre, "Around the Map" at the New Amsterdam Theatre, "Ruggles of Redgap" at the Fulton Theatre, "Katrinka" at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre, and "A World of Pleasure" at the Winter Garden.

The Hippodrome is open with Sousa's Band, "Hip-Hip-Hooray," and "Flirting at St. Moritz," a big spectacular offering.

PLAYS OF THE NEW YEAR.

New Dramas and Revivals in Diverse Languages This Week.
MONDAY—Liberty Theatre, "The Blue Pierrots," by Maurice Donnay.
Theatre Francaise, "Georgette Le Meunier," by Maurice Donnay.
TUESDAY—Hudson Theatre, "Bunny," by Austin Strong.
WEDNESDAY—Irving Place Theatre. Revival of "Hohet tanzt Walzer."
THURSDAY—Booth's Theatre. E. H. Sothern will revive "David Garrick."